

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 4

NEW YORK TIMES
16 OCTOBER 1982

WASHINGTON TALK

Briefing

The Prince and the O.S.S.

Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands made an unpublicized visit to Washington recently to decorate 16 veterans of the Office of Strategic Services, the deceptively named American intelligence agency in World War II. All the former agents had worked with the Dutch resistance behind German lines.

With not so much as an Embassy news release to call attention to the ceremony, the Prince presented a Cross of the Resistance to each of the old O.S.S. operatives, among them William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence.

In the war, Mr. Casey was the London-based O.S.S. official who directed the secret "Melanie Mission" that placed American intelligence agents behind enemy lines to work with Dutch resistance fighters. Some of the other recipients of the Dutch medal were members of an outfit called the "Jedburghs," American and British operatives trained in Scotland.

"I recognize that this came 35 years too late," Prince Bernhard told the recipients in an emotional reunion at the Army-Navy Club. He had come to know some of them personally during the war.

Most already knew the reason for the long delay.

Veterans of the Dutch resistance rejected the idea of a medal for themselves until 1980 when one was struck by Royal decree and presented to more than 300 survivors of the Dutch resistance by Prince Bernhard, who in 1942 played a major role in streamlining the Dutch intelligence operation.

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